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ABSTRACT

Although most nineteenth-century American parents relied staunchly on common sense in raising their children, by the 1920s numerous parent education programs had been established to urge a scientific approach to child rearing. Today, American parents are besieged with medical and psychological advice about bringing up "normal" children. This study of the education of American mothers shows how the tides of opinion about proper child care have shifted from the early 1800s, when maternal associations discussed biblical and secular theories of child rearing, through the 1950s, when books like Dr. Spock's "Baby and Child Care" were widely consulted, to today's era of television advice-givers. The book draws from a wide range of historical sources and describes the medicalization of mothering, ongoing negotiations between mothers and professionals, and parents' reactions to the experts' recommendations. Following an introduction, the book's chapters are as follows: (1) "Fitting Their Nurture to Their Nature: The Emergence of Education for Motherhood"; (2) "Divine Motherhood versus Intelligent Parenthood: Women's Organizations and the Child-Study Campaign"; (3) "'What Is the Matter with Our Children Today?': Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the Parent Education Movement"; (4) "Bringing Science to the People: Delivering the Message of Scientific Motherhood"; (5) "Caught between Common Sense and Science: Mothers' Responses to Child Development Expertise"; (6) "Democracy Begins at Home: The Practice and Politics of Parenting in the 1930s and 1940s"; and (7) "Dear Doctor: The Impact of the Baby Book on Post-World War II Mothers." The concluding chapter explores attitudes about motherhood and gender roles in parenting and asserts that if we want to live in a society that knows how to care for children and their mothers, maternal practices and discourse about children should become the concern of all citizens. (Contains extensive notes, by chapter.) (HTH)

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